

NORRISTOWN, PA—On April 16, 2009, Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-07) met with Montgomery County Superintendents at the Montgomery County Intermediate Unit in Norristown, Pa., to discuss challenges that schools are facing in light of the current economic environment and support for education in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. The Congressman met with Dr. Amy F. Sichel, Abington School District; Dr. William Kiefer, Cheltenham Township School District; Dr. Vincent Cotter, Colonial School District; Dr. William Lessa, Hatboro-Horsham School District; Dr. Timothy Wade, School District of Jenkintown; Dr. Christopher McGinley, Lower Merion School District; Marykay Feeley, Lower Moreland Township School District; Dr. Timothy J. Quinn, Methacton School District; Dr. Janet Samuels, Norristown School District; Dr. Robert Hassler, North Penn School District; Dr. Clifford L. Rogers, Perkiomen Valley School District; and Dr. Bradley Landis, Pottstown School District.

Congressman Sestak discussed with those present the economic challenges facing schools, as well as federal efforts to address them in the Recovery Act. “It is important that we put people to work building 21st century classrooms, labs, and libraries to help our kids compete,” Congressman Sestak said.

The other programs supported by the Recovery Act are IDEA Special Education, and Title I Help for Disadvantaged Kids. For IDEA, \$13 billion is set aside for formula grants in order to increase the federal share of special education costs and prevent these mandatory costs from forcing states to cut other areas of education. For Title I, \$13 billion will be used for grants to help disadvantaged kids in nearly every school district and more than half of all public schools reach high academic standards.

During the meeting, the Congressman also discussed the growth model as an efficient alternative to assessing states and school’s adequate yearly progress (AYP). The Congressman hopes to bring about the reauthorization of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), including giving credit to states and schools for the progress that their students make over time through the use of growth models. It will continue to place strong emphasis on reading and math skills, but it will also allow states to use more than their reading and math test results to determine how well schools and students are doing, in order to assess student learning and school performance more fairly, comprehensively, and accurately. For high schools, one measure will be graduation rates. Finally, the legislation will drive improvements in the quality and appropriateness of the tests used for accountability. This is especially important for English language learners and students with disabilities, who will continue to be included in the accountability system.

With unemployment up, more people want to go to school to upgrade their skills, but tuition is also up, and more of these students need student aid. This investment addresses those short term needs while investing in our nation's future economic strength. For Pell Grants, \$15.6 billion will be allotted to increase the maximum Pell Grant by \$500, from \$4,850 to \$5,350; for college work-study, \$490 million to support undergraduate and graduate students who work; a Student Loan Limit Increase will raise limits on unsubsidized Stafford loans by \$2,000; and \$2.1 billion to Head Start to provide comprehensive development services to help 110,000 additional children succeed in school. Funds are distributed based on need.

Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "Deep Blue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the U.S. Congress.

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